

AGENDA ITEM #

July 12, 2002

To: Delta Protection Commission
From: Lori Clamurro, Delta Protection Commission Staff
Subject: Delta Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program –
Community Meeting #1
(For Public Hearing)

Since January 2002, the Commission's Agriculture Committee has been acting as the Steering Committee for the establishment of a Delta Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Area, per the direction of the Commission.

US Dept. of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA NRCS) staff and members of the Agriculture Committee briefed local land trusts, county Agricultural Commissioners, local Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs), and county farm bureaus on the RC&D program in January and February 2002. The Committee is now seeking additional support and local interest in establishing a Delta RC&D Area.

The draft Area Plan (attached) will be the basis of the application that is submitted to Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman (due October 2002). The Agriculture Committee/RC&D Steering Committee have reviewed the draft Area Plan, and is now interested in familiarizing a broader audience of Delta residents and stakeholders with the RC&D program, and incorporating a broader perspective into the draft Area Plan.

After the three community meetings are held, the application and draft Area Plan will return to the Agriculture Committee/RC&D Steering Committee at its August 22 meeting, and will come before the full Commission again for approval at the Commission's September 26 meeting.

The Committee is seeking letters and resolutions of sponsorship for the Delta RC&D from the five Delta counties' Boards of Supervisors and from local RCDs, and letters of support from any other groups or residents who support the concept.

To date, the following people have been participating on the Steering Committee or providing input to the draft Area Plan:

- Bob Ferguson, South Delta Reclamation Districts
- Daniel Wilson and Topper van Loben Sels, North Delta Reclamation Districts
- John Meek, San Joaquin Resource Conservation District (RCD)
- Steve Shaffer, Dept. of Food and Agriculture
- Banky Curtis, Dept. of Fish and Game
- Don Nottoli, Sacramento Board of Supervisors
- Pam Muick, Solano Land Trust
- Al Medvitz, Solano County Farm Bureau
- Russ Matthews, San Joaquin County Farm Bureau
- John Viano, Contra Costa County Farm Bureau
- Mike Eaton, The Nature Conservancy
- John McCaull, American Farmland Trust
- Dan Connelly, Ducks Unlimited
- Craig Lundborg, California Delta Chambers and Visitors Bureau
- Paul Robins, Yolo County RCD

The following representatives were invited to participate on the Steering Committee, but to date their participation and interest have not yet been confirmed:

- John Currey, Dixon RCD
- Kathy Kelly, Yolo Land Trust
- Catherine Baranek, North Delta Conservancy
- Tony Dutra, Lower Cosumnes RCD
- Walt Hoppe, Florin RCD
- Marcia Gibbs, Ulati RCD
- Ron Harben, Alameda County RCD
- Jim Toland, Contra Costa County RCD
- Casey Stone, Yolo County Farm Bureau
- Leo Van Warmerdam, Sacramento County Farm Bureau

The Steering Committee is now actively pursuing expanded participation on the Steering Committee, and ideally sponsorship of the RC&D effort, particularly from local RCDs. The response from these groups on whether they'd like to sponsor the application along with DPC and San Joaquin RCD will ultimately determine the proposed Delta RC&D Area boundary; at this early stage, the proposed boundary has been the Legal Delta.

Delta Resource Conservation and Development Council

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2002 – 2005 Area Plan

GOAL A
NATURAL RESOURCES PROTECTION

Objective I: Homeland Security

Statement of Need: The Delta is unique geographical area in California, which provides critical freshwater resources to over 23 million people in the State. Most urban areas in Southern California, in addition to most San Joaquin Valley agricultural areas, are served by water exported from the Delta through the State Water Project and federal Central Valley Project. The potential threat from terrorists to this freshwater supply, on which the State and Nation rely for its drinking water and unique specialty crops, substantiates the need for protection of this resource at all costs. Currently, the U.S. Coast Guard and local sheriffs' departments are trained in the identification of and procedures in dealing with potential terrorist activity, but these entities do not have the budgets and personnel to adequately address potential terrorist activity specifically in the Delta area.

Strategy 1: Promote adequate protection of Delta resources from terrorist activity.

Action

- 1.1 Encourage the U.S. Coast Guard and local sheriffs' departments to train Reclamation District representatives, recreational boaters, and other Delta residents and visitors in the identification of, and procedures in dealing with, potential or suspected terrorist activity.
- 1.2 Establish a comprehensive reporting system through which suspicious activity can be reported and addressed quickly.

Objective II: Agricultural Sustainability and Farmland Preservation

Statement of Need: Delta farmers face many of the same challenges as other farmers in California (increased production costs, environmental regulations, elimination of processing facilities, competition from foreign markets, encroachment of urban areas). However, there are factors specific to the Delta area that have impacted, and are expected to continue to impact, the Delta's agricultural economy. These include, but are not limited to, the bankruptcy of Tri-Valley Growers in July 2000, various tomato-processing plant and sugar beet factory closures, implementation of the CALFED Bay-Delta Program, increased regulatory environment, rising energy costs, deflated market prices

for crops, and levee maintenance. In addition, Delta landowners have unique responsibilities and costs associated with levee maintenance, and there are unique hydrologic conditions associated with low ground surface elevations, a high water table, and a high percentage of organic soil.

Strategy 1: Support long-term viability of commercial agriculture.

Action

- 1.1 Support the continued operation of local agricultural support services and processing facilities (trucking facilities, wineries, processing plants, etc.).
- 1.2 Promote development of new agricultural enterprises and cooperatives.
- 1.3 Investigate and support the development of new markets and uses for existing Delta crops (e.g., the cultivation of beets and corn for ethanol production).
- 1.4 Provide leadership in a regional marketing campaign to promote Delta agricultural products.
- 1.5 Encourage farmers to diversify their income through the co-existence of energy-generating facilities (such as wind turbines or biomass processing plants) on their lands.
- 1.6 Assist regulatory agencies in developing and coordinating common policies for the Delta, and provide a forum through which landowners may address regulatory conflicts and issues.

Strategy 2: Discourage inappropriate development of agricultural lands.

Action

- 2.1 Identify and protect high-value, productive agricultural lands.
- 2.2 Direct new residential, commercial, and industrial development within existing communities, and to sites where appropriate services are available.
- 2.3 Provide information and assistance to Delta landowners on tax and incentive programs designed to assist them in keeping their lands in agricultural use.
- 2.4 Address contact problems along the agricultural/urban interface (e.g., traffic, restrictions on agricultural operations due to populations in nearby urban areas).

Strategy 3: Support solutions to hydrologic issues associated with low ground surface elevation and a high water table.

Action

- 3.1 Support projects, such as the planting of rice or other sediment-accreting crops, to reverse subsidence and raise the elevation of Delta lands.
- 3.2 Promote cropping systems that reduce soil exposure and oxidation (e.g., hay cultivation on the inside of levees).
- 3.3 Seek U.S. Dept. of Agriculture funding to make cropping systems that reduce soil exposure and oxidation economically viable.
- 3.4 Support installation of consolidated drainage infrastructure (pumps and outfalls) to alleviate impacts on land from the Delta's characteristically high water table.

Objective III: Levee Maintenance and Rehabilitation

Statement of Need: The Delta's levee system is critical to national security. Over 23 million Californians depend on fresh water supplies from the Delta, for all of the State's beneficial uses. Recent cuts to the budgets of State and federal agencies that have historically administered levee maintenance programs, and increasingly stringent regulatory standards, are making levee maintenance very expensive (and with current dredging windows, nearly impossible) for local reclamation districts.

Strategy 1: Support the improvement and long-term maintenance of Delta levees.

Action

- 1.1 Provide leadership in coordinating permit reviews and guidelines for levee maintenance.
- 1.2 Promote emerging geotechnical methods for the protection and accretion of sediment to Delta levees.
- 1.3 Develop a reliable long-term funding program for levee maintenance.

Strategy 2: Encourage dredging to enhance the capacity of Delta channels for flood flows.

Action

- 2.1 Provide leadership in founding a comprehensive dredging and dredge material management entity for the Delta, similar to the Dredge Material Management Office established for the San Francisco Bay area.
- 2.2 Encourage the sharing of resources among reclamation districts to facilitate emergency operations.
- 2.3 Develop a database through which dredged material may be efficiently bought and sold between interested parties.
- 2.4 Develop a reliable long-term funding program for dredging operations.

Objective IV: Water Quality Improvement

Statement of Need: Water is a key element of agriculture. Delta agriculture is unique because most Delta lands have riparian water rights, and landowners have signed agreements with Dept. of Water Resources regarding water quantity and quality. Challenges continue regarding availability (elevation of water in Delta channels) and localized water quality issues, particularly in the area of the South Delta, which is heavily influenced by State Water Project and Central Valley Project pumping operations. In addition, new and more stringent regulation of agricultural discharges is under consideration by the State and Regional Water Quality Control Boards, and may be forthcoming in the near future.

Strategy 1: Protect long-term water quality in the Delta for agricultural, recreational, and fish and wildlife habitat uses, as well as all other designated beneficial uses.

Action

- 1.1 Pursue adequate water quality for Delta agricultural operations, supporting funded programs that minimize salinity intrusion.
- 1.2 Pursue adequate water quality for water-contact recreation uses, supporting funded programs that reduce the presence of pathogens and other bacterial contamination in Delta channels.
- 1.3 Pursue adequate water quantity and quality for fish and wildlife habitat uses, including promotion of agricultural drainage techniques that improve agricultural runoff quality and other programs to diminish the levels of mercury and other contaminants in Delta channels.
- 1.4 Support an expedient solution to the unique problem of lack of dissolved oxygen in the Stockton Deep Water Ship Channel, which impedes the migration of State and federal threatened and endangered fish species up the San Joaquin River.

Strategy 2: Preserve adequate water quantity in the Delta for agricultural uses.

Action

- 2.1 Promote sufficient water elevations to enable agricultural operations to maintain their irrigation operations, through the installation of stage barriers or, if necessary, extension of agricultural diversion equipment.

Strategy 3: Assist in the implementation of any new regulations regarding agricultural discharges.

Action

- 3.1 Support programs that foster voluntary cooperative relationships between landowners and regulators in the management of agricultural discharges.

Objective V: Habitat Protection and Enhancement

Statement of Need: In addition to its important role as the water supply system for over 23 million Californians, the Delta is also critical to various State- and federally-listed endangered species, who use the Delta for part or all of their life cycles. The Delta also provides critical wintering habitat along the Pacific Flyway for waterfowl and other migratory birds.

Strategy 1: Preserve and protect the natural resources of the Delta.

Action

- 1.1 Promote protection of remnants of riparian habitat.
- 1.2 Determine appropriate areas and habitat corridors where restoration projects would yield the greatest benefit.
- 1.3 Discourage land acquisitions by public and nonprofit agencies for habitat restoration purposes based only on the “willing seller” principle, in the absence of a management plan for the property or a comprehensive Delta habitat restoration plan.

- 1.4 Develop a strategy to integrate County Habitat Conservation Plans into larger habitat restoration efforts, such as the CALFED Bay-Delta Program.
- 1.5 Work with State, federal, and non-profit entities in the preservation and enhancement of terrestrial and aquatic habitat.

Strategy 2: Develop strategies for wildlife-friendly agriculture, and agriculture-friendly habitat restoration projects.

Action

- 2.1 Promote seasonal flooding and agricultural practices on agricultural lands to maximize wildlife and migratory bird use of the Delta.
- 2.2 Promote “farm edge” habitat restoration and vegetation projects that don’t hinder agricultural operations while creating corridors and cover for wildlife.
- 2.3 Encourage proponents of habitat restoration projects to provide adequate buffer areas on their own properties, not on adjacent lands.
- 2.4 Pursue “good neighbor” policies, “safe harbor” agreements, and other landowner assurances from regulatory wildlife agencies as part of habitat restoration projects.

Objective VI: Non-Native Invasive Species (NIS) Control

Statement of Need: Critical to the success of any habitat restoration program is the adequate control of competitive non-native plant, animal, and other species. Various State and federal resource agencies implement different NIS control programs in the Delta, but funding limitations are making this battle very difficult and increasingly expensive.

Strategy 1: Facilitate funding and implementation of NIS Control programs in the Delta area.

Action

- 1.1 Provide leadership in coordinating State, federal, and local agency efforts to educate and assist in the control of NIS.
- 1.2 Develop a long-term funding program for NIS control.

<p style="text-align: center;">GOAL B ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT</p>
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Objective I: Improve the Delta Economy

Statement of Need: Most of the geographical region is reliant mainly on the Delta's agricultural economy; recreation and tourism also provide a significant contribution to the regional economy. Recent changes in the Delta environment due to implementation of State and federal programs have severely impacted the Delta's agricultural economy, thereby affecting Delta communities' overall well being. Improving the Delta economy is of great concern throughout the Delta area.

Strategy 1: Stabilize and expand employment in the Delta's agricultural industry.

Action

- 1.1 Establish the Delta RC&D Council as the lead agency for the economic development of the Delta area.
- 1.2 Promote marketing programs and mechanisms to attract agricultural processing, transportation, and other agricultural service industries to the Delta.

Strategy 2: Promote continued recreational use of the land and waters of the Delta, and expand employment in the Delta's recreation industry.

Action

- 2.1 Emphasize the Delta's unique natural environment in advertising the Delta's many recreational amenities and opportunities.
- 2.2 Pursue the concept of the Delta as a unique and separate State of California Tourism Region.
- 2.3 Advocate that Delta lands purchased with public funds incorporate the timely implementation of desired and needed recreational facilities and opportunities on those lands.
- 2.4 Ensure that needed facilities are constructed, maintained, and supervised.
- 2.5 Protect landowners from unauthorized recreational uses on private lands.
- 2.6 Maximize dwindling public funds for recreation by promoting public-private partnerships and multiple uses of Delta lands.

Objective II: Increase Education and Outreach Opportunities

Statement of Need: Many Delta communities are experiencing an economic downturn, due to the depression of the area's agricultural economy. There is a need for education and development of employment opportunities within the Delta RC&D area. There is also a need for greater understanding among communities surrounding the Delta of the uniqueness and critical importance of the Delta for all beneficial uses.

Strategy 1: Conduct outreach in Delta communities to encourage utilization, and community involvement in the development, of RC&D activities and programs.

Action

- 1.1 Work with various Chambers of Commerce in Delta communities, attending meetings to introduce and promote the RC&D program.
- 1.2 Generate community support prior to the initiation of RC&D projects and programs within the communities.

Strategy 2: Encourage the development and use of educational and interpretation areas and displays on publicly-owned Delta lands.

Action

- 2.1 Encourage the development of educational facilities such as the Delta Science Center, the Rio Vista Science Center, and the Pacific Flyway Center.
- 2.2 Encourage interpretive displays and trails on lands acquired with public funds for habitat restoration, recreational, or other purposes.

GOAL C COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Objective I: Improve Delta Rural Infrastructure and Services

Statement of Need: The maintenance of infrastructure, and provision of adequate emergency services, continue to be issues for the Delta. There is a need to improve the communications systems in the Delta area, as well as a need to expand emergency services and personnel within the Delta to accommodate growing Delta communities as well as increased populations of Delta visitors and tourists.

Strategy 1: Improve fire fighting and policing capabilities in the Delta area.

Action

- 1.1 Support and enhance communication and sharing of resources among the numerous Delta volunteer fire departments.
- 1.2 Work with communities to obtain the necessary equipment and communication to reduce emergency response times.
- 1.3 Support increased employment and presence of county law enforcement officials (on land as well as in the waterways) in the Delta area.

Strategy 2: Improve communications systems in the Delta area.

Action

- 2.1 Seek public-private partnerships in the construction and maintenance of cell phone towers and other communications facilities on Delta lands.

Strategy 3: Minimize impacts of the construction of new transmission lines and utilities on existing land uses.

Action

- 3.1 Encourage the location of new construction in existing utility or transportation corridors, or along property lines.
- 3.2 Encourage consolidation of gas extraction structures to minimize displacement of agriculture and wildlife habitat.
- 3.3 Ensure that any new underground pipelines are designed to allow adequate freeboard to minimize impacts to agriculture and wildlife habitat.

Objective II: Increase Delta Cultural and Historic Awareness

Statement of Need: The Delta has a very rich cultural history; its settlement pattern was, and continues to be, closely associated with the rivers, sloughs, and waterways, and the agricultural land use. Many Delta towns serve as social and service centers for surrounding farms, and historically served as shipping sites for Delta agricultural products. These rural Delta communities reflect the diverse heritage of the Delta, and the independence of country living.

Strategy 1: Promote cultural events in Delta communities.

Action

- 1.1 Promote artistic and musical events in association with the area's museums and art galleries.
- 1.2 Promote the numerous themed festivals held annually in the various Delta communities, and attempt to initiate new events or reinstate those that are no longer held.
- 1.3 Encourage interpretive walking tours of Delta communities, focusing on their history and contribution to the settlement of the area.